

Dance Theatre of Harlem facing financial disaster

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA)

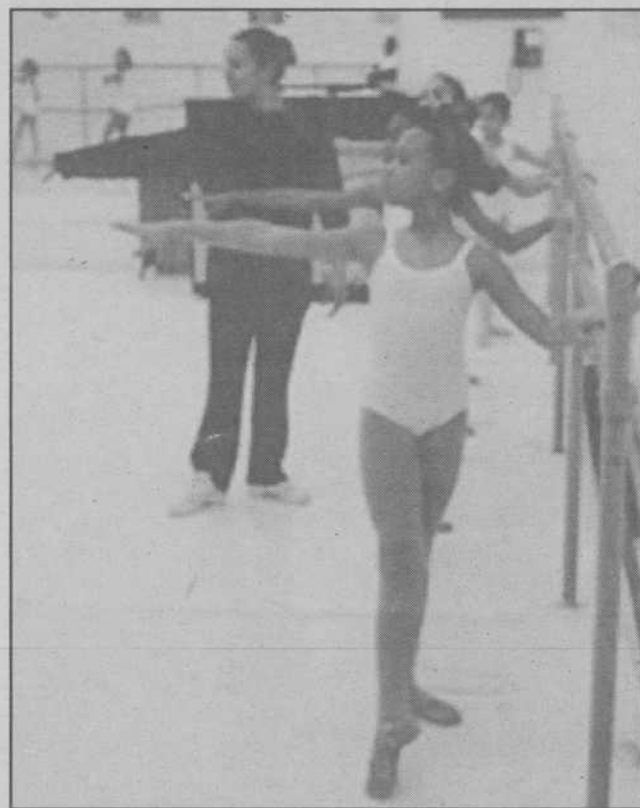
— The Dance Theatre of Harlem, the first Black classical ballet company, appears on the verge of collapse.

Its founder, pioneering Black Broadway dancer Arthur Mitchell, has announced that the 35-year company, which has provided artistic opportunities for hundreds of dancers and thousands of students, is on a hiatus. It has a \$2.4 million deficit, the New York Amsterdam News reported in September, causing some to fear it may not recover.

"It will re-open at some point. When it will re-open, I can't announce yet because we don't have a date yet," says Ellen Zeisler, a spokeswoman for the Dance Theatre in an interview with the NNPA News Service. "We still need individual, founder support, corporate sponsor support without question. What we do there in Harlem is give away community sponsorship for children. To be able to do that, we have to have certain monies in place."

Zeisler would not disclose the extent of the theatre's debt but is hopeful that with large and small donations, the company will soon bounce back.

"We had a fabulous season, the biggest we had in years, 44 weeks, sold out audiences in U. S. and Europe. That's why it was such a dis-



The Dance Theatre of Harlem is facing tough financial times. The legendary company has a \$2.4 million deficit.

appointment," Zeisler says. She says the company hopes to be back in full operation by the end of June 2005.

Mitchell, who joined the New York City Ballet in 1956, becoming a soloist three years later, was the first Black principal dancer of a major company, dancing with the company for 20 years. He founded the Harlem Dance Theatre as a school in 1968. In 1981, the dance theatre was the first Black ballet company to have a season at Covent Garden, London. Famous dancers Stephanie

Baxter, Virginia Johnson, Eddie Shellman, Mel Tomlinson, Donald Williams, and Alicia Graf have all been part of the company.

"It has provided a place for artistic expression for hundreds of Black dancers where they might not get it — especially in the world of ballet because today, opportunities for Black ballet dancers are still very limited," says A. Peter Bailey, author of "Revelations," the autobiography of dance choreographer Alvin Ailey and co-author of (See Dance, Page 9)

Black station sold in East St. Louis

By Bernie Hayes
Special to Sentinel-Voice

ST. LOUIS (NNPA) — Simmons Media, owners of 1380 AM, KSLG, has reportedly purchased Radio Station WESL 1490 AM in East St. Louis from Robert Riggins for \$1.15 million. WESL was the only Black-owned station in the metro region to program urban contemporary and blues artists.

With the sale of the station, Blacks are not losing a media outlet that had provided crucial information, news and analysis on issues to the community, but WESL did provide an outlet for music and artists that is absent from the other area stations — although KDHX (88.1 FM) does offer some blues and R&B music.

WESL played a central role in bringing the region some of the nation's finest personalities and programs. In the early years, the station's call letters were WTMV, WBBR and WAMV before changing to WESL in the early 1960s.

The stations' disc jockeys challenged and competed for the audiences of KATZ, KWK, KKSS, Majic108 (now Majic 105) and KGLD.

In its early years, it also programmed heavily to the gospel market, and aired several churches and religious broadcasts.

Rod "Dr. Jockenstein" King, Jim Gates, Curtis "Soul-Boogie Man" Brown, "Sweet" Charlie Smith, Edie "Bee" Boatner, Decater Agnew, Bill "Fox Chaser" Moore, Michael Tyrone Key, "Big Time" Frank Davis, Doug Eason, E. Rodney Jones, Yvonne Daniels, Cheryl Winston and this writer were some of the many announcers that worked at WESL at one time or another.

There was a time when rhythm and blues programs hosted by Black disc jockeys attracted increasing numbers of White listeners. But, if present trends continue, even more Black-owned stations will become only memories.

Black radio has undergone dramatic changes in recent years, but the genre continues to rely largely upon the music, news and talk programming that popularized the format in its early years.

There are two other Black-owned radio stations in the St. Louis area.

Bill and Virginia White are the owners of St. Charles radio station KIRL-AM, located at 1460 on the AM dial. KIRL is a daytime operation, programming gospel music.

The other Black-owned station is 95.5 WFUN-FM, owned by Kathy Hughes. Its format includes oldies in addition to rap and hip-hop.

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